



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY
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News Release

Clarence H. Carter, Director

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Glendale Retailer Suspected in Massive \$2.3 Million Food Stamp Fraud Bust

Multiple-Agency Effort Leads to Largest-Ever SNAP Fraud Case in Arizona History

PHOENIX – Director Clarence H. Carter and StrikeForce: Quest, a multi-agency task force, announced today the anticipated charges against Bernard Le-Uh and Monica Le-Uh, owners of Nicben African Caribbean Market Plus, located at 6220 N. 43rd Avenue in Glendale for Fraudulent Schemes and Artifices, Unlawful Use of Food Stamps, Money Laundering, Computer Tampering, Illegally Conducting an Enterprise and related offenses stemming from an undercover investigation targeting illegal activities associated with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Final charges will be determined by the state grand jury in conjunction with the Arizona Attorney General’s Office.

The investigation comes after months of a coordinated undercover operation led by Internal Affairs and Special Operations staff within the Arizona Department of Economic Security, in coordination with the United States Department of Agriculture - Office of the Inspector General (USDA OIG), Glendale Police Department, and the Arizona Attorney General’s Office.

It is alleged that on multiple occasions the store provided cash to individuals in exchange for SNAP (food stamp) benefits in fraudulent transactions during the course of the investigation. Preliminary data from USDA estimates fraud against the SNAP program may exceed \$2.3 million from this store location alone since 2010. In addition, 33 SNAP recipients who currently receive benefits will be investigated for possible SNAP fraud, which may result in administrative sanctions and/or criminal prosecutions.

“This successful and historic bust should send a strong warning to all individuals and operations who shamefully take advantage of the public benefits system and the trust of Arizona taxpayers who fund it,” said Governor Jan Brewer. “I am proud of the efforts taken to prevent and detect the fraud in this case – and in the future.”

“The staff of the DES Office of Accountability Internal Affairs and Special Operations has done tremendous work to identify those who chose to take advantage of public assistance programs with the intention of defrauding the public,” said Director Clarence H. Carter. “Through quick detection, ongoing prevention and vigorous prosecution efforts, DES and its state and federal partners are doing their best to protect the integrity of the safety net services we provide.”

Pursuant to the federal Food and Nutrition Service (SNAP), card recipients are permitted to use benefits only for eligible food items. By law, SNAP benefits cannot be exchanged or redeemed for cash. In a

typical criminal transaction, the seller receives a portion of the value of the card in cash and the buyer, removes the benefits from the card through sham transactions.

“The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Inspector General (OIG) will continue to dedicate resources to the investigation of retailers who commit fraud in vital USDA food assistance programs,” said Special Agent-in-Charge Lori Chan, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Inspector General (OIG), Western Region. “It is OIG’s objective to protect the integrity of USDA nutrition assistance programs and stop unscrupulous retailers such as Nicben African Caribbean Market Plus from defrauding a program intended for the purchase of eligible food items, by low-income individuals.”

Officials allege trafficking of SNAP benefits have occurred on multiple occasions at the Nicben African Caribbean Market Plus. Ongoing joint investigative efforts have substantiated that SNAP trafficking activities have been and are continuing to occur at this retail location. These are merely allegations, and defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

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StrikeForce: Quest investigates and prosecutes store owners, SNAP clients and employees. From October 1, 2013, through December 31, 2013, the task force obtained 19 guilty pleas with 16 sentenced to incarceration and 8 people placed on probation. On-going investigations are occurring....